



Hannah Alzgal  
Senate Committee on Rules  
RE: Support SJR 25

March 11th, 2021

Chair and Majority Leader Wagner, Vice Chair Girod, and members of the committee,

My name is Hannah Alzgal, I use she or they pronouns, and I am the Youth Leadership Coordinator at Next Up Action Fund, formerly known as the Bus Project. As an organization that builds political power and strong, effective leadership pipelines for diverse young people, our work and our communities face a glaring issue: 16 and 17 year olds have no say in who will best represent their values and priorities even though they will be disproportionately bearing the brunt of decisions. We need to recognize it's an injustice to bar youth from voting, especially since social issues such as environmental degradation, growing wealth inequality, and the racial violence that Black, Indigenous, and other people of color have a direct impact on their lives. This is why we strongly support SJR 25, the Our Future, Our Vote Act, which proposes an amendment to the Oregon Constitution to lower the voting age from 18 years old to 16 years old.

Youth is a nebulous concept, and, in reality, legal age-based distinctions in our society are arbitrary and based on what is deemed best for society at large, depending on the point in time. In fact, the voting age wasn't always 18. It wasn't until 1970, did the U.S. require that the voting age be lowered to 18 in all federal, state, and local elections. Lowering the voting age to 16 is in the best interests of our democracy.

People often highlight their belief that 16-year olds lack maturity and aren't considered real 'adults' yet. However, 16-year olds actually have 'cold cognition', a thought out decision making process in which they can perform just as well as adults, and are often treated the same as adults by the government, such as needing to pay taxes, eligibility to drive, and even be tried for crime as adults. There is also a wrongful perception that lowering the voting age is both an attempt to have a bigger progressive base and that they will just copy their parents' ballot. This is an idea that transcends party lines as it's priority is to invigorate our democracy by fostering active and engaged community members, not to partisanly shift votes towards one ideology. Research from a 2014 Scottish independence referendum showcased how 16-year olds and 17-year olds won't end up copying their parent's vote, by over 40% of youth having different voting priorities than a parent that was also interviewed. Young people continue to demonstrate and express political beliefs independent from their parents, and what larger society misunderstands about youth civic engagement.

16 and 17-year olds are more than ready to vote. They are not just a passive demographic in our communities; they possess their own, well-informed opinions on topics the same as any adult and are active members. It's time for us to re-evaluate the responsibility that youth hold, and realize they have been ready for more.

I urge you all to pass SJR 25.

Thank you for your time,  
Hannah Alzgal  
Youth Leadership Coordinator, Next Up Action Fund